



COVID-19 – frequently asked questions

What is a coronavirus and COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses known to cause respiratory infections. These can range from the common cold to more serious diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). This new coronavirus originated in Hubei Province, China and the disease caused by the virus is named COVID-19.

How is this coronavirus spread?

COVID-19 is most likely to spread from person-to-person through:

- Direct close contact with a person while they are infectious or in the 24 hours before their symptoms appeared.
- Close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who coughs or sneezes.
- Touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

Most infections are only transmitted by people when they have symptoms. These can include fever, sore throat, a cough, fatigue and shortness of breath.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to other colds and flus and include:

- Fever.
- Sore throat.
- Cough.
- Fatigue.
- Difficulty breathing.

While coronavirus is of concern, it is important to remember that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or fatigue are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness – not coronavirus.

What do I do if I develop symptoms?

If you develop symptoms (fever, a cough, sore throat, tiredness or shortness of breath) within 14 days of leaving a country or region that is at higher risk for COVID-19, or within 14 days of last contact of a confirmed case, you should arrange to see your doctor for urgent assessment. Go to www.health.gov.au/covid19-travellers for the current list of high or moderate risk countries.

You should telephone the health clinic or hospital before you arrive and tell them your travel history or that you may have been in contact with a potential case of coronavirus. You must remain isolated either in your home or a healthcare setting until public health authorities inform you it is safe for you to return to your usual activities.

Should I be tested for COVID-19?

People should **only** be tested for COVID-19 if their doctor believes they meet specific criteria. This includes:

- You have returned from overseas in the 14 days before you feel unwell.
- You have been a close or casual contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case in the 14 days before you feel unwell.
- You have a fever OR acute respiratory infection (e.g. shortness of breath, cough, sore throat) with or without fever.
- You have a severe community-acquired pneumonia and no other cause of it is clear to your doctor, with or without recent international travel.
- If you are a healthcare worker with direct patient contact and have a fever (≥ 37.5) **AND** an acute respiratory infection (e.g. shortness of breath, cough, sore throat).

If you meet any of these criteria your doctor can request you are tested for COVID-19. It is important to remember that many people with symptoms similar to COVID-19 will not have the virus. Only suspected cases are tested to ensure our labs are able cope with the demand. There is no need to test people who feel well and do not meet the criteria above.

Who is most at risk of a serious illness?

Some people who are infected may not get sick at all, some will get mild symptoms from which they will recover easily, and others may become very ill, very quickly. From previous experience with other coronaviruses, the people at most risk of serious infection are:

- People with compromised immune systems (e.g. cancer).
- Elderly people.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as they have higher rates of chronic illness.
- People with diagnosed chronic medical conditions.
- People in group residential settings.
- People in detention facilities.
- Very young children and babies.*

*At this stage the risk to children and babies, and the role children play in the transmission of COVID-19, is not clear. However, there has so far been a low rate of confirmed COVID-19 cases among children, relative to the broader population.

Can I go to public gatherings such as concerts and sporting events?

Currently, Australia does not have widespread community transmission of COVID-19. To help slow the spread, the Australian Government has advised, effective from Monday 16 March that organised, non-essential gatherings should be limited to 500 people.

Non-essential meetings or conferences of critical workforces, such as health care professionals and emergency services, should also be limited. This advice does not include workplaces, schools, universities, shops, supermarkets, public transport and airports.

To protect vulnerable Australians, the Government has also advised reducing visitors to all residential aged care facilities and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

These precautions are most important for people over 60, particularly if they have a chronic disease.

How can we help prevent the spread of coronavirus?

Practising good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene and keeping your distance from others when you are sick is the best defence against most viruses. You should:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet.
- Cover your cough and sneeze, dispose of tissues, and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser
- If unwell, avoid contact with others (stay more than 1.5 metres from people)
- Exercise personal responsibility for social distancing measures

What is social distancing?

One way to help slow the spread of viruses such as COVID-19 is social distancing. This means avoiding large public gatherings if they're not essential and reducing visits to people at higher risk of developing serious symptoms, such as people in residential care facilities and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

There's no need to change your daily routine, but taking these social distancing precautions can help protect the people in our community who are most at risk.

Who needs to isolate?

There are specific requirements in place for people who have returned from a country or region that is at high or moderate risk for COVID-19, or think may they have been in close contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus. Go to www.health.gov.au/covid19-travellers for the list of at-risk countries and isolation requirements.

What does isolate in your home mean?

People who must isolate need to stay at home and must not attend public places, in particular work, school, childcare or university. Only people who usually live in the household should be in the home.

Do not allow visitors into the home. Where possible, get others such as friends or family who are not required to be isolated to get food or other necessities for you. If you must leave the home, such as to seek medical care, wear a mask if you have one. For more information visit www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources

How is the virus treated?

There is no specific treatment for coronaviruses. Antibiotics are not effective against viruses. Most of the symptoms can be treated with supportive medical care.

Should I wear a face mask?

You do not need to wear a mask if you are healthy. While the use of masks can help to prevent transmission of disease from infected patients to others, masks are not currently recommended for use by healthy members of the public for the prevention of infections like coronavirus.

More information

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au

Call the National Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.

The phone number of your state or territory public health agency is available at www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts

If you have concerns about your health, speak to your doctor.